In developing our guidance curriculum we evaluated three commercial programs: Student Success Skills, Character Counts, and Junior Achievement. While we picked these programs because they each focused on one of the three domains of academic, personal/social, and career development, we found that they still managed to address skill development in the other domains as well.

Each one of the programs had a vast amount of research supporting its use. They all have research documenting consistent positive outcomes for students in each area. Junior Achievement’s research base also includes a longitudinal study that showed impact over time and correlations to state and national career standards. Each program has also seen widespread use across many different schools and seems appropriate for all areas, both genders, and a diverse array of ethnic groups. This research base lets school counselors know that these programs are effective and valid, which provides support for their use in the development of a guidance curriculum.

As previously mentioned, each program supports development in all three domains: academic, personal/social, and career. While Junior Achievement primarily focuses on career development, it also helps students build skills in other areas such as developing behaviors that lead to successful learning and developing positive attitudes towards oneself and others. Character Counts, while primarily focused on character building and the personal/social domain, also contributes to the academic domain by encouraging the learning of academic skills in order to build character. Student Success Skills extends beyond an academic focus by fostering development in the career and personal/social domains as well. One advantage of using these programs is that counselors can address all three of the domains, rather than narrowly focusing on just one aspect of development.

It is also easier to integrate these programs into the curriculum at the elementary level, which is another advantage for their use. There is a bit more flexibility at the elementary level and counselors can tie their lessons in to what is being taught at different grade levels. Junior Achievement’s focus on becoming global citizens can easily be connected to lessons in Social Studies. Student Success Skills focus on reading comprehension can be taught in association with a Reading lesson. Character Counts may be tied in to a lesson on leadership in Social Studies or school-wide to the Character Education Program which many elementary schools today are starting to implement.

There are some disadvantages associated with these commercially developed programs. One quite obvious hindrance may be the money involved in obtaining these guidance curriculums. Student Success Skills and Character Counts can be costly, especially for schools with limited funds. For Junior Achievement, many of the lessons that are a part of the program are presented by volunteers from the community, which is a major highlight of the curriculum. However, there are some drawbacks to the use of volunteers. One, there may not be a plethora of volunteers in the community and, two, the volunteers are often individuals from the business community that might not be experienced or knowledgeable enough to provide effective lessons. Another unfortunate drawback of Junior Achievement is that its focus is primarily on understanding the world of business and the global environment with less of an emphasis on personal career development.

Overall, despite the disadvantages involved, there seem to be a number of reasons to support the use of commercially developed programs in the development of a guidance curriculum. Most importantly, they should provide the school counselor with a solid research base so that the counselor can make informed decisions about its use. It also may save the school counselor some time to use a program that has already been documented as effective, rather than developing and implementing a curriculum that will have to be evaluated for its impact. Before implementing any commercially developed program, the school counselor should make sure that it is the right fit for his/her school. These programs can be costly and they can take a considerable amount of time to implement. The school counselor should look at the research available, evaluate the pros and cons, and make an informed decision regarding what programs will best foster the academic, personal/social, and career development of all students.

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